

20 Answers About Influenza

**Facts to inform discussions about the
2009 novel H1N1 vaccination program**

August 2009

#1 What Is Influenza?

- Highly contagious respiratory (lung) infection
- Caused by influenza virus
- Most common from December through March
- We call this yearly flu "Seasonal Flu"

#2 How Does Influenza Spread?

- Spreads person to person
- Mostly spread by coughing and sneezing of infected persons
- May also be spread by contact with something contaminated with infected secretions, such as clothing
- If a person's hand touches infected secretions, it can be transmitted by touching the eye or nose



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™



#3 What Happens When People Get Exposed to Influenza?

- Illness can start about 2 days (range 1-4) after being exposed to influenza
- People MAY be able to give illness to others 1 day before they feel sick
- Symptoms include fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, extreme tiredness, headache and body aches
- Illness can be severe with complications
 - Worsening of other health conditions
 - Pneumonia
 - Death (mostly in elderly)



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™



#4 Who Gets Seasonal Influenza?

- Typical yearly outbreaks last 6-10 weeks
- People of all ages can get infected
 - 5-20% of people infected each year
 - Highest rates in children because they have fewer prior exposures to influenza viruses compared with adults
- Because minor changes in the virus occur all the time, people can get infected with seasonal influenza many times during their life

#5 Who Is Most Likely To Get Severely Ill from Seasonal Influenza?

- Extremes of age
 - 2 years and younger
 - 65 years and older
- Underlying medical conditions
- Pregnant women

#6 What Toll Does Seasonal Influenza Take?

- 36,000 estimated deaths per year
 - Most deaths in persons 65 and older
- More than 220,000 hospitalizations per year
 - One half of hospitalizations in persons 65 and older



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE®



#7 How Do You Treat Seasonal Influenza?

- General recommendations are to rest, drink fluids, and treat symptoms with drugs like acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- Influenza antiviral drugs
 - Can shorten illness when used for treatment
 - Need to start them within 2 days of symptoms starting
 - Can also be used for prevention
 - Require doctor's prescription
 - But are expensive and can have side effects

#8 How Do You Prevent Seasonal Influenza?

- The most important way to prevent influenza is to be vaccinated each year
- Annual vaccination is important because the virus changes continuously, and last year's vaccine may not protect against this year's influenza virus

#9 Who Should Get Vaccinated for Seasonal Influenza?

- Anyone who wants to decrease their risk of influenza
- Especially important for
 - People 50 years and older
 - Those with chronic diseases
 - Children less than 5 years
 - Pregnant women
 - Persons in nursing homes or long term care facilities
 - Household members and caregivers of the above groups
 - Healthcare workers

#10 Does the Vaccine for Seasonal Influenza Work?

- How well the vaccines work depends on both the recipient, and how closely the viruses in the vaccine "match", or are similar to the circulating viruses
- 70% - 90% effective among healthy persons younger than 65 years
- Less effective (less than 60%) among elderly persons and those with underlying illnesses

#11 What is a Pandemic?

- Pandemic refers to the world-wide spread of a new influenza virus not the severity of illness caused by the virus
- Timing and impact can not be predicted although it usually happens about every 40 years
- There have been three pandemics in the last 100 years
 - 1918-19 Spanish Flu
 - 1957-58 Asian Flu
 - 1968-69 Hong Kong Flu



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE®



#12 What is Novel H1N1 Influenza?

- New this year, Spring 2009
- A shift in the H1N1 virus
- A new strain that combines swine, avian, and human genes
- Has circulated around the world
- Is expected to return as part of the 2009 Fall-Winter flu season

#13 How is H1N1 Different from Seasonal Influenza?

- Novel strain of influenza
- Outbreak occurred late in the season and continued to spread during the summer
- Caused social disruption especially to schools
- Caused widespread illness some severe or fatal

#14 How has Novel H1N1 Impacted the US?

- Reports the largest number of novel H1N1 cases of any country
- As of July 24, 2009 more than 43,000 confirmed cases have been reported
- As of late July, 5,000 people are known to have been hospitalized because of infection with novel H1N1
- As of late July, 302 people are known to have died as a result of novel H1N1 influenza virus infection



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™



#15 Who is at Risk with H1N1 Influenza?

- Affected children and young adults disproportionately
- Pregnant women and infants are at increased risk for serious illness and complications
- People with underlying medical conditions are at increased risk for complications
- People 65 years and older have accounted for less than 5% of deaths and surprisingly few hospitalizations

#16 What is Our Best Defense Against H1N1 Influenza?

- Our best tool is vaccine
- Antiviral medications can reduce the symptoms for a sick person and reduce spread to others
- "Social distancing" measures



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™



#17 What are the Realities of H1N1 Vaccine?

- Uncertainty over arrival date of vaccine and the amounts to be available
- Clinical trials and production must occur at the same time
- Likely that 2 doses will be required
- Uncertainty over how widespread and severe H1N1 will be next fall
- Uncertainty about the risk of rare events
- Uncertainty over public demand for the vaccine



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™



#18 Who Will Receive the H1N1 Vaccine?

- Initial priority for pregnant women, household and caregiver contacts of children younger than 6 months, healthcare and emergency medical services personnel, infants, children and young adults 6 to 24 and persons 25 – 64 who have a high risk medical condition
- Vaccination of healthy adults 25-64 years as supply increases
- Vaccination of persons aged 65 or older once vaccination programs are capable of meeting demand for vaccination from younger age groups



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™



#19 What Are We Doing?

- Surveillance- Continue to track flu for change in epidemiology, virulence, antigenic pattern and drug resistance
- Planning- At all levels as appropriate for role in prevention and response
 - Health care system (diagnosis, treatment, surge, vaccination)
 - Schools, child care, jails, other potentially affected institutions
 - Public health (surveillance, testing, response, guidance, vaccination, treatment)
- Communication- Effective communication depends on accurate information

#20 What Can You Do?

- Be informed
- Plan care for sick family members
- Plan for how you might
 - Work from home if needed
 - Care for children if schools were closed
- Practice good habits
 - Cover your cough
 - Wash your hands frequently
 - Stay at home if you are sick
 - Get influenza vaccine as recommended
- Provide your help, advice, and support to the community



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™

